1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OFS Alex OFS

Preface

IN THESE days when books on parts of the world formerly considered remote have become commonplace, when journalists are writing in the first person of experiences on Pacific islands, when travelers dabble in anthropology and anthropologists write travel books, it seems justifiable, perhaps, to identify this volume.

Anthropological field work among American Indians on the West Coast had shown me repeatedly the blind alleys encountered in investigating social processes, if psychological orientations and techniques were not employed. Furthermore, the obvious differences between peoples of different cultures challenged explanation. The false doctrines of racism not only failed to give such explanations; they patently posited the question falsely. In the field of anthropology the work of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Edward Sapir was opening a new and suggestive formulation of the problem of differences between human groups. In 1935 a National Research Fellowship gave me a year in which to explore clinically and theoretically the bearing of various psychiatric approaches to personality formation within our own society. Analytic psychology seemed to offer the greatest number of concepts with which the anthropologist could operate, although much of its theory, particularly in the field of social phenomena, seemed inept.

In the spring of 1936, at Dr. Kardiner's invitation, we collaborated in a joint seminar at the New York Psychoanalytic Society. The seminar was repeated the following spring. At the beginning it was necessary to discuss why the greater part of Freudian sociology was unacceptable to the students of society. From there we progressed to descriptions of cultures based on the literature. For each culture we attempted to identify the factors, both institutionalized and informal but none the less stereotyped, which seemed to be the most formative for individuals in that society. It was a good exercise, but there was no opportunity to check our conclusions. Were individuals predominantly what we might suppose them to be from the institutions under which they lived, the childhood conditioning they received, the values they shared, the goals for which they strove?

Too often descriptive material gathered with other ends in view gave no data on points which seemed vital, and none of them gave an adequate description of character structure and its dynamics. We had talked ourselves out, and only field work could test the procedure.

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

122 Dr. Kardiner at this point contributed funds to the Social Science Research Council of Columbia which that Council supplemented to permit me to undertake field work. Meanwhile, he continued the seminar with Dr. Linton for the two years that I was away, and from these four years' experience Dr. Kardiner wrote *The Individual and His Society*. In the meantime, others in the field of depth psychology and anthropology were working eagerly on the *rapprochement* between these two fields, to the mutual benefit of both disciplines. Historians, sociologists, and political scientists contributed also to the breadth and depth of inquiries in this area. Increasingly pertinent questions were asked and increasingly satisfactory solutions suggested. Differences of viewpoint arose, as they will in any new, vigorous, and still inchoate discipline; but these differences served only to sharpen the sophistication of those who were convinced of the far-reaching practical as well as theoretical importance, for the modern world, of understanding what gives groups of people common character structures.

121 In looking for an area in which to pursue such studies, I searched for one in which gross pathologies were reported to be present, since it seemed to me at the time that by the very grossness of its manifestations pathology could be more clearly understood than normality. Siberia, with its Arctic hysteria, and the East Indies, with lata and amok, suggested themselves. Linguistically, climatically, and politically the Indies seemed more practical than Siberia. Consultation with Dr. Kennedy at Yale and Dr. Josselin de Jong at the University of Leyden led me to select the island of Alor for field work. Actually, Alor provided neither of the Indonesian pathologies which I had anticipated, but the culture was immediately so interesting and challenging, so little affected by European contacts, that my preconceptions were fortunately swept aside.

122 When the choice of field fell upon the Netherlands Indies, I began studying Dutch and then, via Dutch, Malay, which is the *lingua franca* of the area. Neither language went very fast until I reached Alor in 1938. There I was forced to use what passed for Dutch with the seven or eight Netherlands officials on the island. Ali, the Javanese boy I had brought from Batavia, understood only Malay. For better or for worse both languages had to be used and in them I developed fluency if not elegance.

123 Ali stayed for only six months before returning to his family in Java. Like myself he was a foreign influence in the village, which, for my purposes, was best left as little disturbed as possible. He was, more-

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

over, a gentleman of wealth and prestige to the Alorese, and he was a Moslem. It was evident that the villagers had an eye for litigation where their women were concerned, and that was a source of trouble it seemed wise to avoid. To Ali I entrusted all the care of establishing a household in an island unfamiliar and remote to us both. This duty he discharged with such skill, tact, and devotion that I have never lived so carefree a domestic existence in areas replete with what pass for civilized conveniences. To Ali was entrusted also the training of five Alorese boys, one from each of the five villages in the valley where I worked. Five boys may seem an excessive staff, but in this way no one of them had too much unaccustomed work, and each was free to play a normal part in village affairs, and I had the inestimable advantage of an informant and host in each community. Also, as I learned later, the impartial distribution of cash wages stood me in good stead.

The choice of the village in which I was to work involved long sessions with the radjah of Alor and several horseback trips into the interior. When I chose Atimelang, the radjah was obviously reluctant. He feared and distrusted these savage mountaineers who had been embroiled in the murder of his uncle, the former radjah, some twenty years before. His "kapitan," however, was willing to vouch for my safety, and two hours after the decision was reached, I had purchased the corn crop growing on the land where my house was to be built overlooking the dance place. The floor plan of the kind of house I had designed in terms of local building ability was staked out—a verandah, a living room, two bedrooms, and a store room. To one side was to be the kitchen and bath house. From the hill rising sharply back of the village, water was to be brought in a bamboo "aqueduct" from a spring which was reported to flow all year. I was assured that in two weeks the miracle would be wrought. When the Dutch controleur returned at the end of two weeks with me and the twenty-eight carriers, the house was not completed; it had barely been started. The controleur had to go back but I stayed on in the government rest shack to see the job through. The next two weeks of cajolery improved my Malay and gave me a start at the local language.

This language had not been studied before and, of course, had no written form. It seemed useful to give it some name, so I called it Abui, which is the word the local people used to designate themselves as opposed to the coastal people. From the beginning vocabularies and texts were taken down phonetically, and by the time that autobiographical material was recorded a year later, I was able to translate directly

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

Part 1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

The Problem

STUDIES of primitive peoples have been put to almost as many uses as there are theories in the social and psychological sciences. Essentially the problems of anthropology are the same as those of the other sciences dealing with human beings. Anthropology differs from these only in its subject matter, which is primarily the cultures of nonliterate peoples. This subject matter is of paramount importance, however, since it presents a series of independent attempts by men to live gregariously.

No culture values equally all human potentialities; rather every culture selects certain of them and rejects others in order to create its own particular configuration. This point of view has long been a platitude to most anthropologists, but the other sciences, naturally, have been slower in reaching the conclusion that cultures are selective: that some stress maternal care, some value competition, some are preoccupied with sex, and still others with the acquisition of wealth, and that the resultant personalities are conditioned accordingly.

History and the biological sciences were among the first to draw on the findings of anthropology. Now sociologists, economists, and psychologists of many persuasions are making use of the data which anthropologists bring back from the field. Needless to say, influences have been mutual. This volume is directed primarily toward the relationship between anthropology and psychology, and it has leaned on the techniques and concepts of several schools of psychological thought. Because of the financial nature of the culture discussed, economists should find much of interest here, and the implications seem fertile also for sociology.

It is accidental that these problems have been studied on an island of the Netherlands East Indies. That the Netherlands Indies now bulks large on the political horizon should enhance interest in a study which was conceived and executed without regard to the present situation. It is also accidental, but none the less instructive, that the island of Alor should have a culture that at first sight seems almost to caricature some of the salient values of our own.

The primary purpose of this book is to discuss the relationship between people and their institutions in a village complex called Atime-

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

[2] lang on the island of Alor. This is not an exercise in the esoteric, but rather an attempt to understand a problem so basic that our own social development will continue to be faltering and awkward until the questions involved are clearly understood. In its simplest form the question is: Why is an American different from an Alorese? That they are different is a common sense conclusion, but explanations, from the climatic to the racial, have proved lamentably inadequate in the past. The explanations to be investigated here do not categorically deny all factors previously used to explain such differences; instead they seek the subtle processes which research in the social sciences and the psychologies has formulated and which we may use for the time being as operational concepts.

With such a purpose it is evident that this book will not even approximate a complete cultural description, since it is not feasible to present here more than a selection of the material collected over a period of eighteen months. It should be complete enough, however, to represent the many contradictions inevitable in social institutions and personal lives, in order that any reader who may disagree with the conclusions will be in a position to dispute them from the documentation offered.

Certain assumptions and points of view should be clearly stated at the beginning. The most important of these for the purposes of this book is the concept of "modal personality." It is a relatively new one, for which a variety of terms have been devised and around which many views, both favorable and unfavorable, still cluster.* It seems desirable, therefore, to state as clearly as possible my personal formulation of modal personality.

First, I assume the psychic unity of mankind.† By this I mean that there are certain experiences and certain physiologically determined tensions, felt subjectively as desires, which no human being escapes, however differently he may seek to satisfy them and however different the level of satisfaction may be. Birth and death, growth and sexual desire, fatigue, laughter, and hunger are some of these experiences. No groups of people exist among whom these factors — and many others which it would be pointless to enumerate — are known to be congeni-

* A discussion on basic personality, for example, is found in Abram Kardiner, *The Individual and His Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939). The works of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Ralph Linton, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm (to name only a few outstanding investigators in this area) all bear more or less directly on the concept of modal personality.

† The evidence for this assumption need not be recapitulated here. For a discussion of it see Cora Du Bois, "Some Anthropological Perspectives on Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 24:132–54 (1937).

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

tally absent. The Freudians have stressed sex among such tensions; [2] others may be of equal importance.

For our purposes the interest lies in the way such experiences are met. For example, all human beings feel hunger. In our society a man may be satisfied by eating toast and coffee at eight, a salad and dessert at midday, and a three-course meal of carefully balanced foods at seven. In Alor a person may satisfy his hunger with two handfuls of boiled corn and greens after sunrise and a calabash full of rice and meat at a feast in the late afternoon, with casual nibblings between times. That both men have felt the pangs of hunger and possess means of satisfying them seems to be as important as the way they did it, perhaps even more important. The point is that the basic similarities of human beings the world over are the foundation on which I believe any comparative study of culturally determined personality structuring must rest. This is a basic assumption.

A discussion of the superstructure raised on such foundations in Alor may give the impression that we are more concerned with the differences than with the similarities among human beings. To an extent this is true. But differences are profitably examined only within a single and true category. If an Alorese and an American were fundamentally and categorically different psychological beings, any problem of differentiation would be a false one. In addition, the ethnologist, who is forced to use himself and his human experience as instruments of investigation, would find himself without means of approaching the subject matter.

Modal personality, then, is the product of the interplay of fundamental physiologically and neurologically determined tendencies and experiences common to all human beings acted upon by the cultural milieu, which denies, directs, and gratifies these needs very differently in different societies. We are very intimately concerned, therefore, with the adaptive processes in human beings, and until we know what these are and how they function, the manipulation of institutions qua institutions will at best remain inept, and at worst may result in the destruction of the very ends desired.

The study of adaptive processes is related to the research done by psychologists in learning and conditioning, but as it is here conceived, adaptation is more inclusive than either or both as they have so far been investigated. Furthermore, adaptive processes continue to function throughout life. In any investigation such a problem, particularly when linked to the question of social interactions, cannot be considered solved when it is traced genetically to some single childhood experi-

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

ence. The changing influences during growth are met by changing resources in the individual. These must be carefully traced. As Kardiner has said, "It means a different thing to the growing child to get excellent maternal care during the first five years than it does to get the same care limited to the first two years. And the reason is that the resources of an individual at two are different from those at five." An infant who is on a four-hour feeding schedule has been given a very different initial attitude toward food from that of the infant who is offered the breast whenever it is restless. This does not mean, however, that this single experience, alone, will determine the adult's attitude toward food. It is important to stress that a single experience, traumatic or otherwise, is rarely sufficient in itself to explain the whole adult personality. Repeated experiences in different behavioral, value, and institutional contexts are essential to create personality constellations of such force and consistency that they become apparent to the ethnologist, who, with the best will in the world, can never have more than superficial insight into peoples of an alien culture.

In a study of the modal personality in any culture, the task consists of tracing through with as much consistency as possible the repeated and standardized experiences, relationships, and values which occur in many contexts and to which most individuals are exposed during various stages of their development, when their resources vary. Important as childhood experiences may be, they do not exclusively determine the mature character of the individual.

It is evident from the foregoing that the concept of modal personality is an abstraction and a generalization, comparable, for instance, to those made by anthropologists on the physical level when defining race. This means that the modal personality will not necessarily coincide precisely with the psychological structure of every individual in the society, except as an individual may accidentally approximate the norm.

The importance of this point is that when one operates with the modal personality concept, one is in no way attempting to reduce individuals to a level of uniformity. My own inclination, founded not on scientific proof but on impressions, goes so far as to admit the possibility of innate personality types. Some ethnologists have claimed that individual variations are less pronounced in primitive groups than in our own more complex society. It is quite possible that some societies permit the individual less leeway and pattern him more highly than do other societies. But in Alor both the results of test material and my own impressions indicate a wide range of variations. Ranges, however, are measured on a common base line. On such a base line data will show

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

central tendencies that constitute the modal personality for any particular culture. This volume will deal, all too impressionistically, with both the range and the central tendencies of personality in Alor, and in addition it will attempt to explain the genesis of the central tendencies.

The following, then, are my assumptions: First, there is a psychic substructure, perhaps physiologically determined, which is common to mankind. Second, this may be further elaborated by individual, innate personality trends. Third, these potentialities are acted upon by common cultural pressures and result in central tendencies to which the term *modal personality* has been assigned. It might be added parenthetically that when this type of study is made more frequently and with greater refinement, much light will probably be shed upon these assumptions and their validity.

The question of procedure arises in trying to isolate the modal personality type from among all these more or less justified assumptions. First, the definition of common and characteristic factors of personality in any culture might be established by a series of psychological tests and observations of cross-cultural applicability. Here we are faced immediately by the limitations of such techniques. There is need for further research along these lines, and fortunately the psychologists of many schools, as well as the anthropologists and the sociologists, are increasingly aware of this frontier area.

However, the task of working with modal personality is not only a descriptive one; it is even more importantly a dynamic one. Here cultural analyses, combined with the better established psychological processes of the analytic school, come to our assistance. One criterion, in my opinion, of the success of such a psycho-cultural synthesis is the range and variety of phenomena that can be brought into coherent relationship. If, for example, one can establish a coherent trend in methods of infant feeding, in sex attitudes, in attitudes toward food, economic activities, sacrifices and myths, in such a fashion that it has meaning on both cultural and psychological levels, then one will have achieved a functional synthesis of unusual importance for the comprehension of cultural processes. In determining how and to what degree social forms may be invested with emotion and how emotional investments may be transferred from one social form to another, we shall have made significant advances in understanding cultural change and stability. Only when we have some comprehension of the link between institutions which the individuals bearing those institutions may make on an emotional level, shall we begin to grasp the repercussions involved in social alterations.

1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

Lastly there is a Protestant missionary, whose task is largely administrative. Under him are the casually educated missionary teachers, called gurus, who have been drawn mostly from other islands and who establish the actual proselytizing contacts with the mountain people. It is they who give the rudimentary instruction in Malay and in the three R's furnished in the twenty-five schools scattered throughout the high country. Such a school was in existence from 1925 to 1931 in the village area to be discussed. Then the school disintegrated owing to the hostility of the people to new gurus who replaced the original one. After 1933 only wandering preachers passed through the area. Their influence was minimal since they had no command of the local language and scarcely twenty of the mountain boys understood Malay.

The material that follows in this volume is drawn from a group of mountain people at Atimelang in the Barawahing district. This community lies above the northwest coast in the radjahship of Alor proper. It is only about five and a half miles from the port of Kalabahi as a crow flies, but by trail it is some fifteen miles, which take six to eight hours to cover on foot.

It is native custom in Alor to locate villages on mountain spurs and crests. This formerly furnished some degree of safety in warfare, but it makes water a problem, since springs may be as many as several hundred feet below in the ravine. Villages are usually small; a large one seldom has more than one hundred and fifty inhabitants. Since the pacification of the island by the Netherlanders, there has been some pressure on the natives to move their villages into more accessible locations, preferably on level stretches near the main horse trails that have been built across the island for official use.

The Atimelang complex is such a transposed group. In 1918 the area was embroiled in Alor's most serious war of pacification, which grew out of the murder of the radjah. The government then insisted that the five villages constituting the Atimelang complex move down from the ridges to the floor of an enclosed valley, which gives the impression of being an old volcanic crater. The floor of the valley is at an altitude of some 2500 feet, and the surrounding crest of hills rises between 300 and 500 feet higher. Since in the tropics temperatures drop rapidly with altitude, the thermometer registers usually between 70 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. During eighteen months of recordings the minimum temperature was 59 degrees and the maximum 86 degrees. The humidity, however, even when the rains are over, is surprisingly high, and during the dry months from June to October the unclad mountain people suffer appreciable discomfort from the cold.

2: DuBois E-5 (1938-1939) 1941 OFS Alor OFS

ATTITUDES TOWARD FOOD AND HUNGER IN ALOR

By CORA DU BOIS

121
119

DR. SAPIR'S great respect for the subtlety and complexity of human beings acted as a sobering influence on the growing interest of anthropologists in psychology and upon the contributions they made to social psychology. As an anthropologist he minimized in no way the tremendous power of society in shaping people but he never permitted his interests as a social scientist to blind him to the infinite variety of individuals within a culture. He went even farther and in conversation, at least, would support the probability of innate personality types. This sound caution against the environmentalists' inclination to overvalue conditioning was a great advantage to his students. At the same time he laid full stress on studying the socialization of the child.

It seems possible to combine these two principles in a preliminary and tentative fashion by making certain assumptions, following certain methods of reasoning and thereby arriving at certain generalizations about people within a given cultural framework, without at any time denying that the processes and symbols are going to have tremendously different values in the total economy of the individuals involved. It is with this in mind that I should like to discuss attitudes developed toward food and hunger in a particular culture.

It can be reasonably assumed that all human beings have certain physiologically determined tensions. One of the most obvious of these is hunger. But nowhere do human beings discharge this or any other basic tension directly. All societies have devices whereby such tensions are delayed, redirected, and often elaborated. To acquire these devices children everywhere must be subject to disciplines. Such disciplines may be of various types and undoubtedly the question deserves close comparative study. For our purposes it will suffice to point out that they may be permissive, restrictive, or absorptive. By permissive disciplines are meant those by which children are encouraged to acquire certain behaviors through a variety of immediate or delayed rewards. By restrictive disciplines are meant those which definitely deny the child certain types of activity by punishments ranging from physical violence to withdrawal of approval. The absorptive disciplines are those not consciously imparted, as are the permissive and restrictive, but rather those behavior patterns so consistently observed in other members of the group that the child acquires them by a kind of psychic osmosis.

It is important to stress that a single discipline of childhood or a single traumatic experience is rarely sufficient in itself to set cultural personality types. Repeated experiences in different behavioral, value, and institutional contexts alone will create personality constellations of such force and consistency that they may become apparent to ethnologists who,

2: DuBois E-5 (1938-1939) 1941 OF5 Alor OF5

with the best will in the world, can never have more than a superficial insight into peoples of an alien culture.[1]

Lastly, there is so far no very definite knowledge of what ego mechanisms will be employed by the individual in reacting to frustrations associated with different kinds of disciplines and discipliners. However, from the psychoanalysts and the psychiatrists there is a growing insight into personality processes like projection, introjection, sublimation, and so on. I assume these processes to be universal to mankind, although I should expect variations in weighting from culture to culture.[2]

The procedure, therefore, is to consider a basic physiological tension, see how it is acted upon by disciplines of childhood, what repetitions it finds in a variety of contexts and how it is crystallized by (or into) institutional behavior through those personality mechanisms I have assumed to be universal to mankind.

Hunger, as one of the basic and obvious tensions of human beings, everywhere subject to delayed, redirected, and elaborated gratifications, suggests itself as a point of departure for testing the procedure outlined above. The people used for this purpose are the Atimelangers, who belong to a cluster of five mountain villages on the island of Alor in the Netherlands East Indies.[3]

The experiences of the Atimelang child with hunger and food are to be considered first. Immediately after birth the mother takes the child in her arms and offers it the breast to suckle at will. From four to six days after birth the mother remains in the house with the infant rather constantly in her arms. When the umbilical cord has dried and dropped off, the mother and child leave the house for the first time and from then onward the child is offered in addition to its mother's milk many different kinds of premasticated foods and vegetable gruels. Any refusal of the child to nurse freely and frequently when opportunity offers during this first period of life is considered a serious symptom of ill health and gives rise to considerable concern in parents. After the first week the child is given adult diet as fast as it will take it, and a child of about eighteen months can often be seen at a feast alternately nursing and sucking a cube of boiled pork fat.

Since, however, women are primarily responsible for garden work and the subsistence economy of the Atimelangers, they return to regular field work often ten days to two weeks after the birth of a child. It is not customary for the mother to work with the child on her back or even near her, as it is in some societies, so the infant is left at home in the care of some kin, usually the father or older sibling. There is great variation in solicitude and effectiveness of feeding care received by infants from these substitute mothers. Also some wom-

[1] I am indebted to Dr A. Kardiner and some of his colleagues for their insistence on the need of repetition in many contexts to set certain personality trends.

[2] For a discussion of these mechanisms see Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London, 1937).

[3] The material used in this article was collected by the writer during eighteen months of residence on the island of Alor, extending from January 1938 through June 1939. Acknowledgments are gratefully made to the Social Science Research Council of Columbia University and to Dr A. Kardiner who made this work possible.